

U.S. Chamber of Commerce Blasts Congress

Speaker of the House Paul Ryan, R-Wis., and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., are in danger of losing one of their most influential allies over their inability to get much of anything accomplished on the major pieces of President Donald Trump's agenda.

In a letter to the GOP leadership, U.S. Chamber of Commerce President Tom Donohue ripped them over the gridlock that has formed over the repeal and replacement of Obamacare and how that has negatively impacted tax reform efforts. Here's the full text of that letter:

For nearly 40 years the U.S. Chamber of Commerce has endorsed candidates for Congress based on their commitment to the free enterprise system, which we were founded to defend a century ago.

In the last election, the Chamber endorsed 240 candidates. In the upcoming cycle, in addition to looking for candidates who support free enterprise, we will be focusing on individuals with a demonstrated willingness to govern, which means reaching consensus so that legislation can be passed and enacted into law.

We are a quarter of the way through this Congress, but we are not yet where we need to be on key issues like health care, tax reform and rebuilding our crumbling infrastructure. Promises were made; promises must be kept.

At this point Congress must more fully turn its attention to and accelerate its effort to enact tax reform, which will grow the economy and create jobs. It has been 30 years since our tax code was updated, and American businesses and workers are suffering as a result. True tax reform is going

to require compromise and give and take.

I have said for some time now that any viable tax reform plan will entail winners and losers amongst the chamber's diverse membership. But we are willing to judge any tax plan based on one simple test: will it spur economic growth? If it does, we will be for it. I encourage members of Congress—all of whom have their pet issues on tax reform—to judge proposed legislation based on growth.

To the Congress's credit, members have used the Congressional Review Act to achieve the greatest regulatory rollback since at least Ronald Reagan.

But on issues requiring negotiation and compromise—even just within the majority party—there is a seeming inability to come together. What is worse is that this is affecting not just the major agenda items but the routine business of governing: confirming nominees, adjusting the debt ceiling and keeping the government open.

And the problem isn't just on the left, the right, or the center; it spans the political spectrum.

For example, Congress is obviously gridlocked on health care, and it is holding back progress on pro-growth priorities like tax reform. Health care is a deeply complicated issue that the Chamber cares about. We supported each version of "repeal and replace," not because we necessarily thought each successive attempt was perfect or even better than the last, but because we recognized that we wouldn't get everything we wanted in any one bill; each iteration was a compromise. As always, we stand ready to work with members and the administration to restore affordable access to health coverage and services, but the time for the Congress to act is now.

Another roadblock to progress on pro-growth policies is the Democrats' role in slow-walking Senate confirmations of

Trump nominees. While the pace of nominations from the administration has been slower than we might like, Senate Democrats are engaging in a concerted effort to delay and slow down the president's nominees. Rather than allowing many non-controversial nominees to be approved by voice vote, as Republicans did during President Obama's first year in office, Senate Democrats are routinely forcing nominees—even those they support—through the procedural, time-consuming hurdles of cloture and recorded votes. What possible purpose could such tactics have other than to impede the functioning of our government?

The challenge of governing requires a willingness to step beyond looking for reasons to oppose things to finding reasons to support policies that are good for the country. The time has long since passed to get to "yes" on health care, tax reform and infrastructure investment.

In the coming weeks, the Chamber will be launching a multi-faceted effort in support of comprehensive tax reform. And a year from now, we will be evaluating Congressional candidates based on their support of the free enterprise system and their willingness to govern, as demonstrated by what role they played in helping enact the first major tax reform in 30 years. Members of Congress be warned: Failure is not an option. {eoa}